

January 8, 2014

John Shipe, Chair
Planning Board
Town of Concord
c/o Department of Planning & Land Management
141 Keyes Road
Concord, MA 01742

Dear Mr. Shipe,

The West Concord Advisory Committee (WCAC) serves as a subcommittee of, and resource to, the Planning Board with an active focus on the Village Center in West Concord. In this capacity, we offer the following recommendations related to the Concord Housing and Development Corporation's plan to redevelop a 12-acre parcel of land near West Concord Village as affordable housing and open space known as Junction Village.

Preliminary Assessment

On November 13, we had the opportunity to hear a presentation from Mr. David Hale on behalf of the CHDC relative to the proposed Junction Village development process. There are undoubtedly several planning issues that will come under consideration as part of this process, but as the planning process is still in its formative phase, we offer only some preliminary thoughts at this point based on our early impression and public feedback received at the forum on November 13.

Additional thoughts and feedback are likely to follow as we get a better sense of what is finally proposed for the site.

Committee Recommendations

Based on (i) our understanding of the presentation by Mr. Hale, (ii) public comments received during our November 13 meeting, and (iii) WCAC deliberations at a public meeting on December 18, the following issues have been identified as key considerations for this proposed project:

1. Goal for Development Planning

The WCAC noted that the CHDC seems to view the primary goal of development for this property as being to provide affordable housing for "as many souls" as possible and to get Concord out of further affordable housing requirements through 2039. In our view the primary goal of development for this parcel ought to be the identification of a combined affordable housing/open space development that fits well within the surrounding community. While we understand the difficulty in identifying sites for affordable housing development, we see a need to locate affordable housing evenly throughout town, and we note that West Concord Village does not represent the Town's greatest need with respect to affordable housing stocks. Rather, we would focus project development on the planning issues listed below.

2. Village Scale and Character

The West Concord Master Plan, the Village Centers Study before that, and innumerable informal surveys and polls have identified the West Concord Village scale and character as a key preservation goal by residents, business owners, and business operators. With this in mind, the Committee has consistently expressed concerns regarding very large developments that continue to proliferate in or near West Concord Village (see next point). While we understand that from the perspective of maximizing profit (from a private development perspective) or maximizing affordable housing (from a CHDC goal perspective) bigger developments may yield greater returns, there is substantial concern by the WCAC about the large scale and mass of a potential project in the setting of West Concord Village given that one of the six West Concord Master Plan priorities is that “new building development [be] attuned to village scale and character.” (WCMP, p. iii). This priority is emphasized throughout the Master Plan. (See, for example, pages 1-3, 2-31, 3-1, 3-19, in the WCMP and p. 16 in the Design Guidelines).

From an architectural standpoint, the “village scale” that currently exists in West Concord is a typical building being in the 30,000-40,000 square foot range, rather than a single larger building. If several buildings are developed simultaneously, they should be given unique architectural features that avoid the look and feel of one very large development that are out of character with current development.

We will continue to be actively involved in helping to define appropriate village scale with respect to this project as we learn more about the type of project being proposed.

3. Cumulative Impact of Development on West Concord

As with other recent letters to you regarding other key developments in West Concord Village, we urge you to consider this application in the context of the cumulative impacts of many recent developments that have taken place in the village. As part of our West Concord Master Plan, a vision for a bustling, pedestrian-friendly, and eclectic village center was laid out in detail. This proposed development could result in further achievement of several of the objectives of that plan, but the overall vision will not be realized unless consideration is given in the context of other developments as well as other aspects of the vision such as scale, character, pedestrian access as well as parking and traffic. While this application can be considered in isolation, the impacts of its development on the Village must not.

4. Open Space

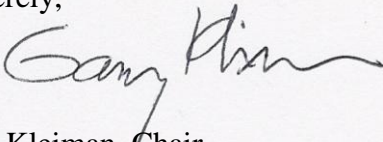
This site represents a unique opportunity to develop some of the last undeveloped open space within walking distance of the village center. As such it represents a unique opportunity to provide additional and greater access to our scenic, historic waterways that flow through the Village. We encourage that special attention be paid to how the open space component of this property is addressed, including public access for passive recreation as well as flood storage capacity.

5. Establish Appropriate Capacities for the Site

In terms of determining what type of development fits well with the surrounding community (see first point), the WCAC recommends that the Planning Board reverse the typical process of considering a developer's proposal and instead identify the appropriate increments that fit within sustainable services provided by the Town. For example, rather than the CHDC requesting Planning Board approval for a particular development that might change traffic on Winthrop Street from a level C condition to a level D condition, we could ask 'what sort of development would maintain level C conditions?' Similarly, we could ask 'what kind of development would fit within the available capacity in local schools?,' or 'what is the capacity of local sewer for a single development,' and 'what is the ability of the Village Center to absorb more traffic and parking associated with nearby development?' This process will help to identify the appropriate limits for a proposal that could inform the CHDC RFP process.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Planning Board process. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or for any assistance that we can provide as you consider these important development projects in and near the heart of the West Concord Village District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Kleiman", written over a light gray rectangular background.

Gary Kleiman, Chair
For the West Concord Advisory Committee